

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBJECT: Implementation of Zero Tolerance Policy for Parks and Recreation

DATE: 10-4-22

☒ **RECOMMENDATION**

☒ **POLICY DISCUSSION**

BUDGET INFORMATION:

☐ **STATUS REPORT**

ANNUAL-

☐ **OTHER**

CAPITAL-

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: Voting to adopt the Zero Tolerance Policy for the Parks and Recreation Department

PURPOSE: Alicia and I have worked with our county attorney to draft a Zero Tolerance Policy for use at the Parks and Recreation Department to govern volunteer, parent, and spectator behavior requirements at Parks and Recreation Department events.

BACKGROUND / HISTORY: It is standard practice for parks and recreation agencies to adopt a policy like this. It was brought to my attention that our parks and recreation department does not currently have a Zero Tolerance Policy implemented, so we reviewed and consulted many other agencies' guidelines and drafted our own process in conjunction with the county attorney.

FACTS AND ISSUES:

- We handle complex situations dealing with parental & general public behavior at parks and recreation department events and need a policy to govern decisions made
 - Sometimes those complex situations include a volunteer coach who the policy would also extend to
 - This would aid our department in treating all issues and individuals equitably
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OPTIONS:

- 1) Approve recommendation
 - 2) Deny recommendation
 - 3) Commission defined alternative
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RECOMMENDED SAMPLE MOTION: Motion to approve the acceptance of the Parks and Recreation Department Zero Tolerance Policy

DEPARTMENT: Parks and Recreation

Prepared by: Brooke Whitmire

Director: _Brooke Whitmire_____

**ADMINISTRATIVE
COMMENTS:**_____

_____ **DATE:** _____

County Manager

Sportsmanship and Spectator Policy

In support of our young athletes and in order to preserve youth athletics as a family friendly environment, Habersham County (“County”) has chosen to adopt a Zero Tolerance Sportsmanship and Spectator Policy (“Policy”).

ZERO TOLERANCE OF PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR:

The County will have **zero tolerance** for:

- Profanity or inappropriate language of any kind;
- The use of racial or ethnic slurs and sexist or homophobic slurs or comments
- Physical and/or verbal abuse of athletes, game officials, coaches, County personnel, or other spectators
- Verbal or written threats directed at athletes, game officials, coaches, County personnel, or other spectators

Anyone who is identified as exhibiting such behavior may be immediately removed from the premises and ultimately may be banned from returning in the sole discretion of the County and its appointed designees. The County reserves the right to contact local law enforcement to respond to any behavior the County feels is violent or threatens violence. This Policy applies to ALL sporting events hosted at Habersham County facilities, sponsored by Habersham County, or sporting events participated in by Habersham County Park and Recreation sports teams.

Fighting:

Violent behavior will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Any student, coach, or spectator who intentionally injures, intentionally attempts to injure, or confronts physically another student, coach, official, spectator, or other person immediately before, during, or immediately after any County sponsored activity, will be immediately removed from the premises by local law enforcement and declared ineligible to participate in future County activities.

Firearms:

Any coach, student, spectator, or official, who brandishes or threatens to brandish a firearm while attending County youth athletics will be immediately removed from the premises by local law enforcement and permanently banned from all future County sporting events. There are zero exceptions to this Policy’s position on the use of or threatened use of related of firearms and Habersham County will address all such threats swiftly and seriously.

VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION TO POLICY:

ALL parents understand by allowing their child(ren) to participate in County youth sports, they are thereby agreeing to adhere to this Policy and to require their child(ren) and other visitors who may attend sporting events with the parents to adhere to this policy.

ALL coaches, players, parents, relatives, siblings, and other spectators are required to maintain the highest standards of conduct and behavior at all County sporting events including, but not limited to, practices, games, and tournaments. Abusive, obscene, and threatening language or gestures, violent play, violent conduct, fighting, and other behaviors detrimental or disruptive to the sporting event are an infraction under this Policy and will be responded to accordingly.

It is the responsibility of ALL present at the sporting event to support the presiding official of that particular sport, ie: referees, umpires, officials, etc., **yelling, belittling, or heckling of these presiding officials will be considered an infraction under this Policy** and will be responded to accordingly. Failure to adhere to these rules regarding treatment of officials has the potential to lead to a hostile environment for players, officials, and all other participants and spectators. In order to maintain the safety of all in attendance, criticism, sarcasm, harassment, or intimidation of any kind, verbal or written, towards the presiding officials will not be tolerated under any circumstances and violating individuals will be removed from or banned from sporting events.

SPORTSMANSHIP DEFINITION:

Sportsmanship is an understanding of and commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity, and general goodwill towards opponents, officials, coaches, and spectators. It is an affirmation of discipline and to maintain poise while either participating in or watching a sporting event. Sportsmanship requires an individual to react tactfully and calmly in high pressure situations. Simply put, Sportsmanship is a choice to act with integrity and display good character.

EXPECTATIONS OF SPORTSMANSHIP POLICY:

COACHES—Coaches must demonstrate the highest level of good sportsmanship on and off the field. Coaches are expected to:

- Address bad behavior of the parents/fans during competitions, if possible, or notify County officials/designees of the individual – Coaches should ask a parent/fan who is being disruptive to politely refrain from their yelling, cursing, etc. – Under no circumstance should a coach engage a parent or fan or in any way act in a manner that could escalate a situation.
- Teach clean, fair play to all athletes
- Lead their team by example of good sportsmanship and strong character
- Be courteous to opposing teams, officials, monitors, and facilitators at all times.

- Respect officials and accept their decisions with grace – any discussion with officials regarding a call must be conducted in a respectful and courteous manner.
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship before, during and after games, win or lose.
- Not engage in verbal, written or physical threats aimed at any participant, official, coach, County personnel or spectator.
- Not initiate or engage in any fight or scuffle with any individual – including but not limited to, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, etc.

ATHLETES—Athletes must follow the County rules during all practices, games, tournaments, and other organized County events. Players are expected to:

- Play fairly and follow all rules and policies.
- Be courteous to opposing teams, officials, monitors, and facilitators at all times.
- Respect officials and accept their decisions with grace
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship before, during and after games, win or lose.
- Encourage teammates to act with good sportsmanship
- Not to engage in verbal, written or physical threats aimed at any participant, official, coach, or spectator
- Not initiate or engage in any fight or scuffle with any individual – including but not limited to, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, etc.

SPECTATORS—Spectators are expected to demonstrate good sportsmanship and show respect to all players, officials, and coaches. Spectators are also expected to:

- Be courteous to opposing teams, officials, monitors, and facilitators at all times.
- Not coach players from the sidelines during the game.
- Not criticize or harass the officials or coaches – officials decisions should be accepted with grace
- Not approach officials before, during, or after games to harass or berate them regarding decisions or calls made.
- Cheer and support all players regardless of the outcome.
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship before, during, and after games, win or lose.
- Communicate with the coach and create a supportive environment.

- Understand and respect the different roles of parents and coaches.
- Understand that improper behavior at any event may result in a parent being asked to leave the field or event by a referee or other official and respect that action
- At all times show empathy for our young developing athletes
- Not engage in verbal, written or physical threats aimed at any participant, official, coach, or spectator
- Not initiate or engage in any fight or scuffle with any individual – including but not limited to, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, etc.

OFFICIALS— Officials (referees, umpires, line judges, etc.) must demonstrate the highest-level good sportsmanship on and off the field. The County expects all Officials to uphold the rules of the game and to abide by the rules and regulations of their certifying entity, including conducting themselves in a sportsmanlike manner. The County will report Officials who fail to do so to their certifying entity. Officials are expected to:

- Address bad behavior of the parents/fans, coaches, and athletes during competitions,
 - Under no circumstance should an Official engage in bad behavior with a disruptive individual or in any way act in a manner that could escalate a situation.
- Require and enforce clean, fair play during all sporting events.
- Perform their duties fairly and equitably, making decisions according to the rules of the sport being played for and against both teams.
- Conduct discussions with coaches regarding a decision or call in a respectful and courteous manner.
- Not to engage in verbal, written or physical threats aimed at any participant, official, coach, or spectator.
- Not initiate or engage in any fight or scuffle with any individual – including but not limited to: pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, etc.

INFRACTIONS AND PENALTIES:

An infraction of this Policy will be deemed to have occurred if a coach, spectator, official or athlete has exhibited any of the behavior listed above and a member of the County’s personnel gives the individual either a warning or asks them to leave the premises. The determination of whether the behavior is a minor infraction, is a subsequent infraction or rises to the level of a serious infraction is in the sole discretion of the County personnel.

- **Minor Infraction**—Verbal Warning:

- In the event of a minor infraction, a verbal request or warning will be given by the County personnel (or may be given by a coach or official) and it is expected that the reason for the warning will stop immediately. If the behavior continues, it will be responded to as a subsequent infraction.
- **Subsequent infractions—Removal from Premises:**
 - The offending individual who has failed to cease bad behavior following a warning (either during the same event or at other events following the warning) will be asked to leave the premises immediately until the next scheduled event.
 - The County reserves the right to take further action including, but not limited to, multiple game bans, depending on the severity of the situation. The determination of severity lies solely in the discretion of the County and the County personnel.
- **Serious or consistent infractions – Permanent Ban:**
 - In the event of serious bad or violent behavior, the offending individual may receive a permanent ban from all County sporting events.
 - The County reserves the right to take any action it deems necessary up to and including contacting local law enforcement to apprehend any individual the County feels, in its sole discretion, threatens the safety of the other players, coaches, spectators, and County personnel present.
- **Failure to Adhere to a Ban – Trespassing**
 - In the event that an offending individual has received a temporary or permanent ban from sporting events and fails to adhere to the ban, the County will consider the individual to be trespassing and contact local law enforcement to remove the individual.
- **Records of Penalties:**
 - All penalties, including verbal warnings, will be recorded by the County. The purpose of this record keeping is to ensure individuals who are repeatedly disruptive and antagonistic to others attending the County sporting events can be removed from the premises and responded to appropriately under this Policy.

APPEAL PROCESS:

Any individual who receives a warning, is removed from a sporting event, or receives a ban for 1 or more events under this Policy may have the decision of the County appointee who issued the penalty reviewed in accordance with the steps below:

1. Fill out and submit a Sportsmanship Policy Appeal Form to be reviewed by the Appeals Panel.

- a. (This form can be found on the website or obtained in person at the Park and Recreation Office)
2. If called, appear before the Appeals Panel to answer questions regarding the incident at issue.

Appeals Panel:

The Appeals Panel will consist of the Director of Parks and Recreation, one coach or other County Park and Recreation affiliate, and the County Attorney. In review of the appeal request, the Appeals Panel Members will take one or more of the following actions:

- Review the form submitted by the accused offending individual.
- Speak with other individuals who were present during the incident in question.
- Speak with members of the Parks and Recreation team to inquire whether there have been past incidents involving the accused offending individual.
- Review records of incidents kept by Parks and Recreation for prior incidents.
- Request the accused offending individual to meet with the Panel and answer questions regarding the incident.

Following Review:

After the Appeals Panel has completed its review of the Appeal Form and all other evidence and testimony related to the incident in question, the Panel will issue a written opinion either granting or denying the appeal.

- If the Appeal is denied, no further action will be taken by the Panel and the original penalty issued remains in effect.
- If the Appeal is granted in full, the Appeals Panel will provide a copy of the written opinion to the Parks and Recreation team. All penalties previously issued will be removed.
- If the Appeal is granted in part, the Appeals Panel's opinion will include a modification of the original penalty and a new penalty will be described in the opinion.
 - A grant in part does not condone the behavior at issue nor prevent the Appeals Panel from reinstating the original penalty if the bad behavior occurs again.

Appeals Form

Sportsmanship and Spectator Policy

Compliance with Appeal Process:

By filling out and submitting this form to the Director of the Habersham County Parks and Recreation department, you agree to participate in the appeal process as may be required of you by the Appeals Panel. Failure to cooperate with the Appeals Panel will result in a dismissal of any submitted appeal. Once dismissed, the appeal may only be re-submitted once within thirty (30) days of the date of dismissal. Thereafter, the Appeals Panel will not review any appeal related to the same incident.

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR THE APPEALS PANEL:

Personal Information:

Full Legal Name: _____

Commonly Used Name (if applicable): _____

Do you have a child participating in Habersham County Youth Sports? YES or NO

If yes, please provide the child's:

Full name: _____

Team Name and Age Group: _____

Coaches Name: _____

Incident Information:

Date of the Incident: _____

Location of the Incident: _____

Penalty Issued by County: _____

Name of County Official Who Issued Penalty: _____

Reason Given for Issuance of Penalty: _____

Statement why you believe the Issue Penalty is Unjustified:

Description:

Please provide a brief summary of facts describing the incident which resulted in the issued penalty in the lines below – The Appeals Panel will not review additional pages of a description, please be concise.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

In signing this Form, I assert that everything contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: _____